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NOTE FOR: Gary

FROM: DCI



Xerox cy to Gary

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Keep gov't files open

By JONATHAN BENNETT

A national coalition to defend the public's right to examine government records was founded last week after a day-long conference in New York City.

The conference was held in the face of mounting right-wing attacks on the Freedom of Information Act (FOIA), the law that has "produced a revolution in the ability of public-interest organizations to get information about government activities," as Center for National Security Studies Director Morton Halperin told the conferees.

According to conference cochairperson Peter Weiss, "the FOIA faces serious threats from many quarters." As examples of the anti-FOIA trend he cited the U.S. Justice Department's censorship of the Progressive magazine, the prosecutions of anti-Vietnam war activist David Truong and ex-CIA agents Frank Snepp and Philip Agee.

The conference was called by the Fund for Open Information and Accountability, Inc., which is devoted primarily to the promotion of freedom of access to government records.

The conference agreed to the following objectives: to broaden support for the FOIA to such bodies as labor unions and church groups; to encourage the FOIA's use; to do wide public education about the FOIA's value; to rally other activists to the cause of defending FOIA, and to make the defense of FOIA an election issue.

Most of the attending organizations agreed to do ongoing FOIA defense work as a coalition. Organizations joining the coalition include the Center for Constitutional Rights; the Campaign for Political Rights; the Freedom of Information Clearinghouse; the Committee for Public Justice; the Peoples Alliance; the New Democratic Coalition; the Fund for Open Information and Accountability; National Lawyers Guild; Women's International League for Peace and Freedom; the Committee for Freedom of Information of the Organization of American Historians; the American Ethical Union, and the American Civil Liberties Union.

For more information: the Fund for Open Information and Accountability, 36 W. 44 St., New York, N.Y. 10036; tel. 212-730-8095.